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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to synthesize portions of the African American dialect literature that have relevance for designing, implementing, and evaluating school-based language programs for African American dialect speakers, and also to suggest guidelines for developing such programs. Because the issues reflect divergency and controversy, it is necessary to verify the match between philosophical underpinnings and program practices. The following guidelines are presented: (1) acknowledge and work with the varied interest groups (this involves mediation and coordination between groups, using school district resources, and ensuring that the evaluation plan meets information needs); (2) develop the philosophical bases of the program (e.g., advocate for the child); (3) identify and state program assumptions, values, and goals; (4) incorporate relevant research and theory (e.g., respect and use the richness of the cultural context, employ bridging strategies between dialects, use the child's existing language code-switching skills, identify and work out problems of mismatch in non-verbal communication); (5) assess existing program strengths, weaknesses, and problem areas (e.g., staff training, administrative/school support, relationship between the community and school, finances, facilities and materials, instruction, educational objectives and environment); and (6) develop evaluation plans as early as possible. Contains 40 references. (LB)

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Designing and Evaluating Language Programs for African American (Black) Dialect Speakers: Some Guidelines for Educators

Pauline E. Brooks

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Once Upon A Time, in a speck of dust that was one of the many galaxies of the universe, there was a planet with many nations.

The inhabitants of that planet spoke many different languages, and the dialects of those who had power and influence were held in highest prestige. Those who spoke the least prestigious dialects were mostly the poor who often lived in isolated communities and had little contact as equals with those who spoke the prestige-dialects.

Across the planet, prestige-dialect speakers wrote the textbooks and newspapers, directed television and radio broadcasts, and taught *their* history as *the* history, and *their* dialects as *the* dialects. (In fact, *their* dialects became synonymous with *language*, itself: One did not have a command of language, did not possess the richness of thought nor the appropriate cognitive skills unless one spoke one of *the languages*).

Speakers of these *languages* often queried: "Why can't all these others learn to speak, read, and write as well as we do?" Theories were developed, hypotheses tested, language programs dotted the nations, but still, little success: Children continued to learn and use the dialects of their families, friends, and playmates within their isolated communities, schools, churches, and playgrounds.

Interestingly, little notice was given to a natural, yet predictable, phenomena: When non-prestige dialect speakers lived, worked, played, and made friends among high-prestige dialect speakers, they inevitably learned the high-prestige dialect without problems in a very short period of time! The converse was also true: High-prestige dialect speakers who lived, worked, played and made friends among non-prestige dialect speakers, too, inevitably learned a second dialect.

Could it be that the fundamental problem had more to do with differences in opportuni-ties and isolated living patterns (isolated and unequal housing, job experiences, play areas, schools, social opportunities, and the like), than it did with those issues that preoccupied the nations' social scientists? I wonder.

Into this type of social and historical context step educational designers, evaluators, teachers, students, parents, school administrators, researchers, and many others concerned with the issue of teaching standard (i.e., the high-prestige) dialect to non-standard dialect speakers. Suggestions for what schools need to consider when designing and evaluating dialect-relevant language programs for one such group, namely African American dialect speakers, is the subject of this paper.

African Americans is used as a synonym for Black Americans, Afro-Americans, or American Negroes of the United States. *African American dialect* refers to that which is variously labeled in the literature as Black English, Black Vernacular English, Black Dialect, Black American English, Black American Dialect, Negro Dialect, etc. This term, *African American*, is used throughout this paper as the label of preference for several reasons: First,

it specifies important, but oftentimes ignored, geographical origins and cultural factors that have influenced this dialect. Secondly, this label implies a historical experience—that of Africans in America—which is an integral part of the dialect. And thirdly, the term *African American* partially circumvents the legacy of negative connotations and stereotypes associated with many of the other terms.

The intent is to synthesize portions of the dialect literature that have relevance for designing, implementing, and evaluating school-based language programs for African American dialect speakers. Given this intent and the richness of the literature, it is regretably beyond the scope of the present work to explore a number of related issues: for instance, specific dialect characteristics, prevalence, features, and origins of African American dialect, biased items on standardized tests, and the like.

It is not uncommon to find discussions in the African American dialect literature which relate dialects to politics, culture, history, or economics; battles have raged for years over these kinds of issues. Consequently, the issues presented in this paper reflect some of this divergency (and controversy): For example, there are instances where individual guidelines potentially conflict with one another, especially at the deeper philosophical levels. Thus this paper's emphasis on the necessity of checking and re-checking the match between philosophical underpinnings and program practices.

These guidelines may serve evaluators in several ways: First, for programs already in operation, the guidelines can help identify aspects of programing not previously considered. Used in this way, they generate new sources of information that can be routed into the existing program for purposes of on-going development (i.e., as part of the program's formative evaluation process). Secondly, for emerging programs, these guidelines can be used as a basis for formulating and linking specific program plans to specific evaluation strategies, goals, and objectives. And thirdly, the guidelines help the evaluator to "remember" that instruments, tests, and methodologies for data collection, summation, and interpretation must be as sensitive to issues of dialect and culture as must be the language programs they are evaluating.

Program design and program evaluation are closely related. As such, even when not specified, individual guidelines usually have applicability to both design and evaluation.

Guidelines

I. ACKNOWLEDGE AND WORK WITH THE VARIED INTEREST GROUPS

Many different groups (audiences) have specific interests in the design, implementation, and evaluation of language art programs for African American dialect speakers: these groups include teachers, parents, school administrators, community members, curriculum designers, language arts specialists, the children that are to receive the instruction, etc. Each of these groups is a part of the social ecosystem in which the program must function. It is important to solicit, develop, coordinate, and share input and information among these different interested sources.

A. Mediate and coordinate these groups as allies, not adversaries. Various groups and individuals may hold deep seated values, attitudes, myths, and political points of view concerning standard and non-standard dialects and the education of African American children. These varying views are a source of potential conflict which can disrupt program planning, implementation, and/or evaluation. (In evaluation, this is part of the issue of "political viability" (Stufflebeam & Madaus, 1983)). To illustrate:

- African American parents and community members will neither appreciate nor support school personnel that presume that their children's speech is "lazy, sloppy, unintelliglble, broken . . ."

- Teachers need to feel supported and appreciated (validation): Absence of this support from parents, administrators, and others can generate negative attitudes among teaching staff. These negative attitudes can inhibit the learning environment of the classroom by lowering teachers' and students' expectations for success, reducing staff efforts to acquire and use supplemental materials, and the like.

- Lack of administrative interest and support for the program may convey a message to parents, children, and teachers that African American children simply "don't count".

Coordinating these different groups as *allies* will increase harmony: It can minimize misunderstandings and provide a recognized forum for the sharing of differing opinions. Greater cohesion among these groups will facilitate the "match" between home and school,

while tacitly letting children know that their program is valued (and that they, too, are valued).

B. To what extent are school district resources involved? Most school districts have specialists in creative language arts and related fields. These persons have skills, contacts, and resources of potential value to language arts programs for African American dialect speakers. For instance, such district specialists may be available to provide teacher in-services, language services to children, parent trainings, curriculum development, the application of appropriate evaluation strategies, assistance in acquiring supplemental curricula or in identifying other specialists in the field, and the like.

C. Is the evaluation plan adequate for meeting the informational needs of affected audiences (Stufflebeam & Madaus, 1983, pp. 399-400)? Different audiences will require different information from an evaluation. For instance:

- African American parents have opinions about the school's role in teaching standard dialect (Taylor, 1975). Parents will want to know not only what their children are learning about dialects and language expression, but also that the program does not have detrimental effects in other areas of their children's lives (e.g., on the children's self esteem, self concept, respect for their own language, community, and cultural group, sense of belonging, etc. (Covington, 1976; Daniell, 1984).

- Teachers and other program personnel will want feedback concerning the effectiveness and desireability of specific educational methods, content, and strategies.

- Administrators may want to know about the cost effectiveness of the program, how it fits into the existing school curricula, etc.

Timeliness is also important: Different audiences may have different informational needs at different points in the life of the program. For example, administrators may want to know early in the program about levels of community participation and support, preliminary feedback concerning the suitability of district resources and materials, etc. Teachers and parents will want periodic feedback concerning program effectiveness. And funding agencies may place greatest emphasis on the final outcomes of the program.

II. DEVELOP THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASES OF THE PROGRAM

Different philosophical underpinnings give rise to different program models, methods, strategies and materials. The research literature on African American dialect, in particular, reflects distinct philosophical positions (e.g., see Stockman & Vaughn-Cooke (1982) and Williams & Rivers (1975)).

Given that discrimination and inequalities are part of the history of the larger society's relationship with African Americans (e.g., see Borden, et al, 1970; Bracey, et al., 1972; Burns, 1965; Huggins, et al., 1971; Hughes & Meltzer, 1969; United States National Advisory Commission, 1968), philosophical underpinnings must extend beyond pure educational philosophy to include the wider socio-political context (Hale, 1982, pp. 152-158; Stufflebeam & Madaus, 1982, p. 401). Language and other specialized educational programs for African American children, among other things, must by design and practice: (1) *consciously* and *conscientiously* affirm the value of *all* human beings; and (2) be rooted in historical facts and knowledge, as opposed to myths, stereotypes, and biases.

A. Language arts programs for African American dialect speakers should *advocate* for the child. To illustrate, these educational programs (and their accompanying evaluation designs) should seek to:

1. strengthen the child, not to diminish her, her family, language, culture, or way of life (Covington, 1976; Daniell, 1984);

2. open new educational and social opportunities;

3. enhance the child's positive self-esteem and sense of group and cultural identity -- language is closely tied to one's identity, self concept, sense of group belongingness, and shared world view (Daniell, 1984; Gilliam, 1976);

4. be *non*-oppressive: the strategies, methods, content, and timing of instruction must serve to expand the child's world, not to attack it (Daniell, 1984; Freire, 1970; Hale, 1982);

5. increase the child's **language power**, i.e., the child's ability to effectively use language across a variety of situations and circumstances (Lindfors, 1980; Sims, 1975);

6. first be a quality language arts program (in terms of what is known about language acquisition and bidialectalism), and second, be a quality language arts program for African American dialect speakers. (This relates to Hale's (1982) concern for academic rigor, and Lindfors' (1980) emphasis on the goal of maximum development.);

7. begin where the learner is (Sims, 1975), and develop upon the learner's strengths;

8. be creative, flexible, and dynamic (Hale, 1982; Lindfors, 1980).

B. To assert that which has just been described in point "A" (above), will preclude the use of some types of language arts programs: i.e., programs based on the presumption that by virtue of ethnicity, pigmentation, income, or the like, a particular individual or group (1) cannot talk; (2) has not already mastered an intelligible language; (3) speaks "bad" grammar; or (4) in other ways is mentally deficient, lazy, cognitively inferior, or the like. A review of the history of African American education shows that these kinds of attitudes have long persisted and are even today not moot issues (e.g., see Lindfors, 1980, pp. 366-374; Wiggins, 1976). Though program models based on the above types of "inferiority themes" are clearly *unacceptable*, there remains vast room for variability among *acceptable* program models.

C. "Hammering out" a sound, affirming, philosophical basis for the program serves several purposes, in addition to those already mentioned:

1. This "hammering out" process will help bring to the fore latent attitudes—attitudes about "good" education, African Americans, standard and non-standard dialect, opportunities in the society, etc.—that may later covertly operate to undermine program implementation.

2. It will serve as a basis (or general rule) against which one can check for inconsistencies in program design and implementation. To illustrate, if part of the agreed upon philosophy is that children learn by exploring, creating and inventing, it

would be inconsistent with this philosophy if the program, as implemented, rested primarily on rote memorization and drill and practice. (Several language programs for African Americans, for instance, have tended toward this heavy reliance on drill and practice; *Distar* is one example) (Evans, 1975, pp. 142-152; Lindfors, 1980).)

To briefly summarize, the philosophy that is agreed upon serves to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of the language arts program for African American dialect speakers. It must also incorporate more than pure educational philosophy, taking into consideration the unique characteristics and historical circumstances of the group and the social ecosystem.

III. IDENTIFY AND STATE PROGRAM ASSUMPTIONS, VALUES, AND GOALS

Related to the preceding section, language arts programs for African American dialect speakers must be scrutinized for hidden assumptions, values, and goals that can dilute the power of the program-as-planned. The extent to which racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic biases persist in society-at-large is the extent to which language arts programs for African American dialect speakers must check and re-check for these biases in their programs and in their evaluations.

These biases can be very subtle. For instance, Rudine Sims (1975) pointed out that even the best intentions may go awry—in that particular case, it concerned experimental readers written in African American dialect: In attempts to make the structure of the educational materials more relevant to African American children, educators failed to notice that the *content* of the experimental readers insidiously perpetuated racial and cultural stereotypes.

IV. INCORPORATE RELEVANT RESEARCH AND THEORY

Language is perhaps the most complex activity of human cognition. And though programs must narrow their focus to teach specific language skills, they need also to acknowledge the complexity and intricacy of language. Since African American dialect speakers are not deprived of language, but rather speak one of many possible different dialects of a language, these speakers already possess a storehouse of rich and complex language that programs can and should draw upon.

The following offers a partial review of references, research findings, and theories which have implications for designing, implementing, and evaluating language arts programs for African American dialect speakers. The emphasis is on what educators can do to develop more effective practices. Though there are many points for educators to consider (Pietras, 1980), the issues that follow are consistent with the broad philosophical bases stated earlier in this paper.

A. African American children come from a culture in which they are "bathed in verbal stimulation from morning till night" (Lindfors, 1980, p. 375); they have a live and vital language (Baugh, 1983; Folb, 1980; Hale, 1982; Haskins, 1973; Lindfors, 1980; Smitherman, 1977).

This richness and complexity should be respected and used. Attacking or diminishing that which the learner brings to the learning setting has the effect of silencing, not stimulating, the learner; this defeats the goal of education. Any learner who has been belittled, laughed at, or otherwise treated as a "know nothing" when learning something new (e.g., learning a new language) has experienced what it potentially means to the child to have her every word scrutinized, critized, re-phrased or re-pronounced.

B. Language is closely tied to the life experiences of a people. In African American culture, words are more likely valued as processes or devices to be used in verbal performance; this contrasts with the dominant culture's emphasis on "words as things or products (the written word, fixed, fossilized, permanent)" (Lindfors, 1980, p. 377).

The context is extremely important in African American culture: It may influence how words are used in a sentence (syntax and semantics), or how words are used to reflect the immediate social setting or to reflect specific emotional-psychological factors. The context is the subtle mosaic of shared, common, life experiences; it gives literal and figurative meaning to that which is said (Folb, 1980, pp. 190-217).

C. "Bridging" strategies can be used to facilitate the switching from one dialect to another. For instance, bridging can be used to teach written words as "things" (the dominant culture's emphasis) rather than processes (an African American cultural emphasis). In doing so, these written words need to have intense meaning for the child, already be a part of the dynamic life of the child, and be selected by the child: "What matters is that meanings which have importance to children be the ones we put in print for them." (Lindfors, 1980, pp. 377-

79). The starting point, then, is the language and experiences that children bring with them to the classroom (Sims, 1975) and *associative bridging* must be developed to take the child from where she is in one dialect to goals in a second dialect.

D. Because of its historical evolution (e.g., see Dillard, 1972; Dunn, 1976; Traugott, 1976), African American dialect differs from "standard" dialect along a number of dimensions: spelling, phonology, morphology, syntax, intonation, phrasing, vocalics, etc. (Covington, 1976).

Dialect differences may be considerable, or subtle. Many educators are familiar with general structural differences among dialects (e.g., see Baugh, 1983; Dillard, 1972; and Williamson, 1975, for an overview of the general structure of African American dialect). Oftentimes, however, significant subtle differences go unnoticed by educators. For instance, Williams and Rivers (1975) have identified some of the more subtle differences that exist in labeling the world. Their examples follow (p. 104):

Standard Version (Boehm)	**Nonstandard Version** (Williams & Rivers)
(1) SPACE:	
Mark the toy that is *behind* the sofa.	Mark the toy that is in *back* of the *couch.*
(2) QUANTITY:	
Mark the apple that is *whole.*	Mark the apple that is *still* all *there.*
(3) TIME:	
Mark the boy who is *beginning* to climb the tree.	Mark the boy who is *starting* to climb the tree.

Those authors hypothesized that even these subtle differences in labeling (coding) set' up differential symbolic systems for learners. Thus, language programs must develop ways of accessing, then bridging, these subtle labeling differences and their resulting differential symbolic systems. Assessment and evaluation techniques must also be responsive to this

problem: This language bias may operate to reduce the achievement scores of African American children (Williams & Rivers, 1975).

E. How is the language arts program making effective use of the child's *existing* language code-switching skills (Hall, 1976)?

Not all African Americans speak African American dialect (just as not all European Americans speak standard dialect). For those who do speak African American dialect, however, frequency of use may depend upon such factors as the speaker's age, gender, peers, socioeconomic levels, situation, etc. Depending on the circumstances, many of these speakers employ code-switching skills. Also, African American dialect speakers most likely understand standard dialect (i.e., have receptive skills), because of frequent exposure to radio, television, movies, print media, school, etc.

F. There are many aspects and levels of language that must first be differentiated and then addressed in second dialect learning. Labov (1972) identified the following in this order of priority (p. 5) :

1. ability to understand spoken standard dialect
2. ability to read and comprehend
3. ability to communicate in spoken standard dialect
4. ability to communicate in writing
5. ability to write in the grammar of standard dialect
6. ability to spell
7. ability to use standard dialect in speaking
8. ability to speak with a prestige pattern of pronunciation

The above are areas of language skills that can be worked on in the language arts program. Morrow's (1985) and Farr and Janda's (1985) work has focused on dialect issues in writing. Troutman and Falk (1982) addressed reading issues and Monteith (1980) has outlined basic points that reading teachers need to know, including a listing of books and in-service materials on African American dialect. Emphasizing pedagogical issues, Daniell (1984) has raised important questions concerning the learning context and the attitudes of program personnel.

Several notes of caution: First, Sims (1975) has pointed out, "Since reading is a receptive process, a reader does not need to be able to speak a dialect in order to read it" (p. 24)—thus, the importance of *clearly identifying the specific skills* that the program will teach, and not confusing one skill for another. Second, particularly because of exposure to mass media, African American dialect speakers may have a significantly greater facility with standard dialect than tests conventionally reveal. And third, even when African American dialect speakers both understand (receive) and speak (produce) standard dialect, they may not be wholly understanding and speaking standard "culture" (the bilingual/bi-cultural issue); speakers may be bi-dialectical, but not bi-cultural, especially given the historical patterns of racial/cultural isolation in America.

G. In African American culture, older children (siblings, neighbors, friends, etc.), not just adults, play an important educational role (Lindfors, 1980, p. 380). What cross-age interactional strategies does the program use?

H. Is there a mixture of cooperative (more consistent with African American culture) and competitive (more consistent with the dominant culture) teaching strategies used in this program (Lindfors, 1980, p. 382)?

I. How does the program identify and work out problems of "mismatch" in *non*-verbal communication (Lindfors, 1980, p. 382)? To illustrate: In showing respect, an African American child may look at the floor when reprimanded or spoken to by an adult; the child is showing *respect* for the adult and listening intensely. The teacher who is unfamiliar with African American culture, however, may interpret this non-verbal floor-staring behavior as rudeness: "Are you listening to me?! Look at me when I speak to you!" Or, the teacher's interpretation may be that the child is acknowledging guilt, shame, or culpability for the alleged misdeed: "So, you are ashamed of what you have done!" These types of non-verbal cultural mismatches may unexpectedly give rise to problems in the learning setting.

J. Building upon the idea that programs must start where the learner is, in what ways does the content of the program draw from cultural idioms, metaphors, semantics, and discourse style (Holt, 1975; Smitherman, 1977)? To what extent then, and how, are these and other important aspects of language incorporated into lessons and classroom activities (Whatley, 1980)?

K. First, given the strong value judgments and preferences placed on the various dialects, and second, acknowledging that emotions affect learning, what does this program do concerning African American childrens' understanding and feelings about how others view them and their speech? For instance, does the program teach the children something about the history of their own and other dialects? Are children taught that their dialect is one of many different dialects of English? that all languages are spoken in dialects? and that the standard dialect is being taught to them not as a replacement for some "defective language," but as a tool for increasing communication? etc.

What of the other side of this issue: How does the program identify and work with children's personal attitudes concerning the standard dialect? Standard dialect does not necessarily hold an innate attractiveness for non-standard dialect speakers.

L. If the standard dialect is presented to the children as a "tool," the children must be able to experience it as such. They need experiences and opportunities in places where this second dialect is in fact used. Any tool is of little value if there is no place to use it; the motivation to learn to use such a tool will be valued even less. Obviously, the school is one place where the standard dialect is used. But what of other places? Since many African American dialect speakers live in racial/cultural isolation, they may not receive the full range of opportunities to see and experience the variety of places where standard dialect is functional. What does the program do to motivate students to practice, learn, and use this new "tool?"

M. Related to the preceding point, exposure to new places and circumstances not only through books, photos, films, etc., but by actually traveling there provides a greater bank of personal experiences which children can draw from for writing and speaking. How, then, does the program expose children to new vistas, experiences, and opportunities (Hale, 1982), especially outside their isolated communities?

N. Keeping in mind that children learn a great deal through observation and incidental learning (Glass, 1986), how does the program structure the general learning environment to offer a rich source of incidental learning (i.e., non-intended learning that occurs throughout the day) which is consistent with building and strengthening standard dialect skills?

For example, how is standard dialect used in the setting? By whom? When? Is there a critical mass of standard dialect speakers in the learning setting, or is the teaching staff the

sole source of standard dialect? If children are to learn to speak, read, or write standard dialect, how much time do they actually engage in these specific activities—one does not learn to speak by only being spoken to.

O. Teachers' attitudes toward African American dialect have an impact on the achievement of children who speak that dialect (Berdan, 1980; Covington, 1975, 1976; Lewis, 1980). Covington's (1975) study on reading achievement in African American children found: "From our research, we conclude that language does not appear to be the central variable in reading achievement. The essential variable seems to be the philosophy of the school and the implementation of the philosophy" (p. 52). How, then, does the program work with teaching staff concerning their attitudes toward African American dialect speakers? How do teachers' attitudes affect their expectations regarding students' intellectual and social potential (Lindfors, 1980, pp. 14-15)?

What is the program doing to actively eliminate and prevent negative attitudes that can sabbotage the learning environment?

P. How are lessons spaced (i.e., are they distributed over time or massed together)? What are the reinforcements? How much positive reinforcement do the learners experience? How are errors or mistakes handled? To what extent is the language program integrated into other aspects of the curricula (e.g., to what extent is standard dialect taught as a separate subject, to what extent is it blended into the overall school curricula, etc.)?

V. ASSESS EXISTING PROGRAM STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND PROBLEM AREAS

What are the existing and potential areas of strength, weakness, and problems within the overall program? Components of the overall program include:

A. Staff Trainings: For example, when, how, and how often does teaching-staff undergo pre-service and/or in-service training? Are these trainings timely? routine? on an as needed basis? experiential? etc. Trainings need to cover such topics as:

1. Knowledge of African American dialect:

   - **Research findings and theoretical perspectives**
     Monteith (1980), for example, has summarized thirteen of agreement among researchers concerning African American dialect, standard dialect, and reading. Among the thirteen points not previously discussed are:

     > Black children may become defensively nonverbal or quiet in a test taking situation, making adequate assessment of their language style or ability difficult. . . . Students reading standard English orally in a Black dialect should not be corrected for mispronunciation. They have in fact comprehended and translated at the same time. . . . Black children appear to read standard English as well as they read dialect readers. . . . Students are likely to be diagnosed as having an auditory perception problem when asked to differentiate between two sounds that are not different in their dialect. . . . Black parents are usually adamant about wanting instruction to be in standard English. . . . (p. 557).

   - **Knowledge of materials**
     This includes knowledge of existing materials (e.g., Monteith (1980) provides an annotated listing of relevant books, studies, and in-service materials). Teachers will also need to learn how to develop their own materials, who to contact for technical assistance, etc.

   - **Familiarity and practice with bridging strategies**

2. Staff attitudes concerning:

   - **African American dialect viz a viz standard dialect**
     How is the non-standard dialect valued? as an inferior system for language expression? as a valid, legitimate, dialect?

   - **The learning abilities/capabilities of the children**
     Do staff members perceive African American dialect speakers as "deficient" (e.g., as "lower class," less intelligent, less able to perform well, etc.) or different (in what ways?)?

- **The role of the family and community**
  To what extent are parents and community members welcomed into the learning setting? Are they treated as if they have something to contribute, or are they patronized? What are teachers willing to learn from parents and/or the community?

B. Administration/School Support:

1. Which levels of administrators are involved? To what extent?

2. What kind of administrative support will make the program work well? e.g., direction, resources, information, funds, general support and representation of the program to others?

3. How well does this language arts program for African American dialect speakers fit into the existing school milieu? e.g., fit with other content areas, materials, staff, the physical facilities?

C. Relationship Between the Community and the School:

1. What mechanisms exist for community input? Are these mechanisms used? to what extent? Have community members developed alternative methods for influencing the program? What are these, and why were they developed?

2. What roles (formal and informal) do community members play in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the language program?

3. What is the quality of the relationship betweeen the community and the school? between the community and the specific language program?

D. Financial Security: Inconsistency in funding and lack of financial commitments can easily erode program morale, planning, and effectiveness.

1. What is the financial status of the program? Are funds adequate?

2. Is the financial status affecting program morale, planning, implementation, evaluation, etc.? How so?

E. Facilities: Are the physical facilities adequate? Do they aid or inhibit the program? For instance, classroom furniture that is large, bolted to the floor, or extremely bulky may restrict certain types of small group activities that may be critical to the program: e.g., small discussion groups, planning and performing skits and role-plays, conducting small group round robins for evaluating one another's written and oral projects, etc.

F. Curricula and Materials:

1. Does the program have access to a variety of quality materials which are also consistent with the stated philosophy, values, and goals of the program?

2. Can portions of the program's curricula be blended into or derived from curricula already in use at the school site?

3. How well do these materials reflect the desired or stated aspects of communication that the program intends to target: reading, writing, comprehension, speaking, etc. (e.g., see Labov, 1972)?

4. Has the content been thoroughly screened? Content should be non-insulting, non-denigrating, non-stereotypic, non-racist.

5. Is the content *meaningful* to African American students?

G. Methods and Strategies of Instruction: Hale (1982) has identified several educational issues that bear on language arts programs for African American children. These included consideration of learning styles, talking time, self-expression, and exposure to a variety of learning activities. The following questions reflect additional issues relevant to methods and strategies of instruction:

1. Are the methods and strategies (both as planned and implemented) consistent with the stated philosophy, values, and goals of the program?

2. What opportunities do children have to produce standard dialect in a supportive, non-threatening, environment?

3. How does the program respond to the mix of dialect speakers in the classroom (e.g., standard dialect speakers, African American dialect speakers, non-standard Southern dialect speakers, Spanish-English speakers (e.g., Caló), etc.)?

4. What are the various culturally-appropriate and age-appropriate teaching strategies used in the program?

5. How are the different dialects presented distinctly?

6. What methods and strategies for teaching a second language can be applied to teaching a second dialect? For instance, several of the second language strategies suggested by Lindfors (1980, pp. 417-421) seem applicable:

   - . . . a classroom which provides ample opportunity for children to (1) participate actively, (2) in meaningful situations (such as play), (3) with speakers of the second language [i.e., second dialect], (4) who are friends, that is, whom they choose to interact with.

   - A classroom environment which is responsive to the second language [i.e., second dialect] learner . . .

   - A classroom environment which provides rich diversity of verbal and nonverbal experience . . .

H. Educational Objectives: Though different programs will have different objectives, the basic question remains: "What is the behavior that the child will exhibit as a result of exposure to this language arts program?" Sub-questions to address include:

1. Are the objectives consistent with the stated philosophy, values, goals?

2. In what ways does the program teach what it was designed (on paper) to teach?

3. In what ways does the program measure that which is actually being taught? Have measureable objectives been set (Gray & Di Leonardi, 1982, pp. 10-11)?

I. The General Educational Environment: For present purposes, this is more of a catch-all category; it includes classroom and lesson related factors which may have profound effects on a child's performance:

1. What is the general mood and tenor of the classroom environment?

2. Are materials age-appropriate?

3. To what extent do the children experience successes, positive reinforcements, and acknowledgements for their accomplishments?

4. In what ways does the program attempt to increase motivation, show respect, and to make lessons more meaningful by drawing from the African American child's environment?

5. In response to the question, "Why can't my second grader read. . . . She's very bright, curious, and eager . . .?", Lindfors (1980, p. 391) raised these questions:

    - Has this child's language found a welcome place in school? Has it been regarded as a valid expression system—not corrected but responded to with interest?

    - Did her own experience encoded in her own language expression serve as an important base for her reading, or was she early subjected to printed symbols encoding what in terms of her experience was meaningless?

    - Has she been comfortable and proud in her school experience? Have her nonmainstream behaviors been understood and accepted on their own terms? Has she been able to make a worthwhile contribution in this place?

    - Has her background been viewed and used as a valid base for continuing intellectual and social growth?

    - Has her lively curiosity and its expression been provided for?

    - Have her teachers understood 'where she was coming from' and what she was 'trying to do' so that they could 'respond to what [this] child [was] trying to do'?

VI. DEVELOP EVALUATION PLANS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

All that has preceded can serve as a general guide for designing, implementing, *and* evaluating language arts programs for African American dialect speakers. Additional issues remaining to be considered under the rubric of evaluation follow :

A. Plans for both formative and summative evaluations should be developed early in the life of the program: Frequent feedback to staff from on-going reviews and updates of the program (i.e., formative evaluations) are integral to program enhancement. These reviews and updates identify problems and their resolutions; they are part of the record of the program's evolution. The evaluation that occurs at the end of the program and provides a descriptive picture of what the program has accomplished (i.e., the summative evaluation), "should be planned at the beginning of the program and conducted throughout the program's duration" (Gray & Di Leonardi, 1982, p. 10).

B. Are there mechanisms for on-going and/or periodic formal and informal *input* into this program? This refers to such things as planned trainings, regular updates on program progress, formal and informal feedback to the varied interest groups, etc.

C. Are there mechanisms for the program to *output* information, successes, etc., to other individuals and groups in the wider community? Do interested individuals and groups know what this particular program is doing?

For instance, does the program share information through newsletters or other publications, presentations at conferences and association meetings, etc.? Given the prevalence of problems that may arise when non-standard dialect speakers confront standard-dialect schools, this sharing of information seems critical.

D. What specific instruments, methods, units of analysis, sampling, bases for comparing scores, etc., will be used to assess the effectiveness, or *outcome*, of the program?

What type of evaluation model will best meet the program's needs? (e.g., See reviews of educational models of evaluation by Koppleman (1983), Shrinkfield (1983), and Smith (1983).)

Evaluation is a highly social event, and as such, is heavily influenced by dialect and culture: The instruments, tests, methodologies, etc., must reflect as much concern for dialect and culture as do the language programs they are designed to measure (Wolfram, 1976).

E. Are there changes that go beyond those people who are directly affected, and which influence (i.e., *impact*) others in the community? What are these changes? Who is influenced? and how?

F. Lastly, *The Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials: A Description and Summary* (Stufflebeam & Madaus, 1982) is recommended as a useful overview to the range and direction of evaluative issues that educational programs need to consider when planning an evaluation.

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